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maranatha

"...our conversation is in heaven; from whence we look for the saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ". Phil.3:20



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This publication has taken me back, back to the days when the words "Come, Lord Jesus" were very ready on my lips, when this phrase had been branded in my heart, a time when the peace of the Most High burned deep in my soul and an eagerness for His presence and return motivated my every speech, thoughts and actions. The time of a conscious journey, a pilgrim's pursuit, every step mattered as we echoed along the narrow path leading from the cross to the celestial city "step by step with Jesus".

There are no shortcuts and no easier paths to reach paradise, some had been so deceived and forgot the truth; that 'narrow is the gate and difficult is the way that leads to life and few find it' (Matthew 7:14) and so they have sought alternate routes and ended up at alternate locations. Though repentance is possible, the time spent is irreplaceably lost.

The Lord's emphasis on the subject was worrisome to John. The Pharisees do not bother with such subject and as well the Jews. The churches too had forgotten this subject, and even with some sort of laxity when preached. So much was the matter urgent to the Lord that he had to write to the churches a letter of alarm as a reminder of the day they have all not prepared for.

The devil, like an uncircumcised Philistine (our avowed enemy) has decided to defy the army of the living God during these perilous times. He is roaming about like a roaring lion seeking whom to devour. In fact many Christians who have lost their identities/stand have become a prey in the hand of the wicked one during these perilous times. How are the mighty fallen and the weapons of war perished! The shields of our mighty men have been vilely cast away at the battlefield as though they were not anointed with oil.

Considering the times we live in, many believers are guilty of a neglect of this part. Some of us have gone out, taught, and have baptized men in his name but what have we taught. We may be guilty of teaching SOME things, others NOTHING of which the Lord commanded. We have rather feed God's own flock with chaff and this has profited them nothing but to cause leanness.

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COVER

A stage that the soul of a man will be filled with the desire of his Lord and savior.

A state that the second coming of our King will be of uttermost importance to Christians.

Lord meet us once again and leave us reaching to the heavens, reaching for a clearer view of you, a deeper thought of you. Leave us reaching for that which the hands cant grasp & the eyes cant see. Lord, leave us reaching for You.



editorial

by Bro. Charles Efiang

Teach Us O' Lord

“Thou therefore endure hardness”
2Timothy 2:3a

The scripture does not stammer in the second letter of Brother Paul to his “son in the faith” (Brother Timothy). It lets out the phrase as direct as we can possibly receive it. Pop and plain, straight up, no beating around the bush, the nail with all intent is targeted directly at the head.

“Thou therefore endure hardness”

Don't try to go above it, beneath or around it. Brother endure it. Wait patiently through it not compromising your stands as God will provide strength for the singular purpose of enduring it. So don't give up half way, plant your feet in God's good word as the foundation that will keep you standing through it.

“Thou therefore endure hardness”

These words are a clear proof of the fact that the Christian journey was never intended to be a work in the park. Don't get me wrong, there are days of green pastures and still waters that lead to soul restoration but there are also days of valleys of shadows of death, days we ought to fear no evil because we are sure of the fact that God is very present with us.

So *“Thou therefore endure hardness”*

Because hard times are upon us, the days grow harder by the minute and a lack of endurance will lead to caving in, giving up, running off the tracks and surrendering to the very powers we are called and empowered to vanquish. Dark days have overtaken us and our lights will indeed heal the lost, raise the hopeless, give life to the broken and save the dead. We were made for times like this.

Please *“endure hardness”*

For many have fallen by the way and many are still falling and the very chosen have neglected the message of the cross hence evil is prevailing in ways that are totally unacceptable. We are weak in contending for the faith; persecution seems to very easily derail us. We are called to endure when the situation presents itself. Have we so readily lost our courage and stamina, have we so easily been over powered by the wiles of the devil? God forbid.

“Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.”

2Timothy 2:3

Where are the soldiers committed to winning back the lost kingdoms of this

world for their Lord and Saviour? Where are the “good” men waiting for the orders from heaven's gate, waiting eagerly to do the master's bidding? Where are those who have located the strength of our God and beheld the power of His might, bearing the full armour and awaiting the command to advance? Where are the pilgrims who have lost sight of what this world has to offer and are pressing towards a higher call of far greater nobility? Where are the Christians?

This publication has taken me back, back to the days when the words “Come, Lord Jesus” were very ready on my lips, when this phrase had been branded in my heart, a time when the peace of the Most High burned deep in my soul and an eagerness for His presence and return motivated my every speech, thoughts and actions. The time of a conscious journey, a pilgrim's pursuit, every step mattered as we echoed along the narrow path leading from the cross to the celestial city “step by step with Jesus”. A time when seeking the lost was priority for what was important to God had to move me. A time when my greatest desire, my one singular passion and all I really wanted was to be a Christian.

This is a wake-up call for those sleeping at their post, this is a recruitment form for those who haven't even begun this walk, and this is an encouragement for those who still remain faithful to the cause of heaven. God is looking to make soldiers, let's not hinder Him. ■



THE PILGRIM'S DIARY

By Bro Emmanuel Eyo-Ita

The pilgrim's diary or as I have loved to call it - the Pilgrim's daily. Many have come down the narrow, somewhat lonely but brightly lit path leading to a paradise for pilgrims and have turned back or fallen off along the way. Some have deliberately jumped ship while others have merely slumped and fallen to the ground from sheer exhaustion and so rolled off the path and found themselves on another. Some have been scared away by the 'rules and regulations' while yet others when faced with arrows have decided it wasn't worth it anymore. Some pilgrims as they walked along simply could no longer endure the lure from the 'Vanity Fair' going on just below them and so took a detour. For most this detour has become a permanent and new pursuit, one which has kept them occupied and has blinded their eyes and veiled their minds from their initial pursuit. Yet another group assumes they still are on the narrow path but in truth are roaming the broad streets with eyes closed in a dreamlike state, ready to argue all day with anyone who dares to point out their straying. Some and seemingly the minority have walked so far that there really isn't any turning back for them and yet a few others have gained entrance into this 'mythical' paradise and hope to see many more join them. It is the lives of these few we hope to x-ray as we take a journey through this study.

We will look through the lives of some and hopefully be able to 'imitate them as they imitated Christ'. By so doing we might just achieve great heights as they have, setting milestones and footprints in the sands of time for others to follow. The daily lives of the pilgrims, the pilgrim's diary, welcome.

May I state at this point that this is by no means an avenue to be judgmental or point fingers at anyone we deem to be weak. It is an opportunity for self-evaluation as we seek to know how steady and steadfast we are on the pathway to righteousness.

Salvation was always the entrance examination unto this long windy path; one which the pilgrims all had to sit for and succeed at. So after years of wallowing around in sin and wrong with great conviction the consciousness and realization of the need for a change became imminent. At this point salvation is acquired.

Let us consider Pharisee Saul who later became Bro Paul in Acts 9:1-7. As we consider those verses we see a man who was neck deep in rebellion against God. It is important we realize the following facts and correct certain impressions as follows;

1. We all had rebelled against God

just as Saul did. The fact that we didn't carry guns or swords after the Christians we knew nor did we imprison them doesn't make us any less a rebel than Saul was

- 1 Samuel 15:23 tells us that disobedience is as witchcraft.
- Suffer not the witch to live is the verdict in Exodus 22:18

In the state of rebellion we feel all is well and we are doing the right thing. The same conviction with which he preached the gospel even in chains and despite ship wrecks he had previously persecuted the church (Acts 26:10-11). It is therefore important to realize that salvation only comes by a change in this orientation. This change can only be executed by the Holy Spirit to remove the scales that blinded our eyes while we walked satisfactorily and gleefully down the wide open road (Acts 9:18)

2. This change in orientation is accompanied by a few more steps as seen in Acts 9:4-6

- A need to acknowledge God for who he is; Lord and savior. We hear Saul cry out "who are you Lord?"
- The realization and acknowledgment of wrong doing. The mere presence of God makes us see ourselves and our sin. His presence is light that shows us up for who we really are. Isaiah in Isaiah 6:8 saw himself in his imperfect state soon as

the presence of God was revealed to him.

- The willingness to do as instructed by this new Lord and to live right. This depicts surrender to His will, guidance and direction.

3. It also is important to note the individuality of this experience. The men with Saul didn't have the same experience as he did despite being there with him and the fact that they were on the same mission with their hearts, just like his, set to torture the Christians. Yet they didn't have the same experience. (Verse 7). They didn't know what was going on. They heard but they couldn't see. They weren't convicted like he was. I imagine them going on without him to carry out the decree for which they had sought and gotten permission without feeling any remorse. They felt Saul had missed it and so they carried on with this, their sacred and all important task of persecuting the 'Christians'. His experience was for him and him alone. In Galatians 1:15-17 Paul speaks about not seeing a need to confer with man after he was called by God. He knew quite well that his experience and future walk down the pilgrim's path would be totally individual hence he stuck to his task and went ahead as he had been instructed.

As this pilgrim has now stepped into this new path with total surrender of his will to the will of God he experiences a new found peace that surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:7). This joy is a result of the presence of God within him granting satisfaction and rest from all worries. It is that which the psalmist called the joy of salvation (Psalm 57:12). This was what the early Christians enjoyed in Acts 2:46-47 as they fellowshiped together sharing all they had and living in peace with one another. Understanding (Philippians 4:7). This joy is a result of the presence of God within him granting satisfaction and rest from all worries. It is that which the

psalmist called the joy of salvation (Psalm 57:12). This was what the early Christians enjoyed in Acts 2:46-47 as they fellowshiped together sharing all they had and living in peace with one another.

Next, the pilgrim was found to be preparing for the days ahead, hidden away from the world and all he had walked away from. This was Saul alone praying and remaining stayed on God (Acts 9:11). There was more preparation to come but only after a next and vital step.

"...receive the Holy Spirit" John 20:22. These were the very words of Jesus before he left his disciples and sent them into the world.

The importance of the Holy Spirit to the pilgrim cannot be over-emphasized so at this point we will take a dive into discussing this matter. Why does the pilgrim need the Holy Spirit at all?

Jesus really did stress the issue of receiving the Holy Spirit. Luke 9:1-2 tells us that Jesus gave them power as he sent them out; power to do exploits like driving out demons and curing diseases as well as preaching the gospel. This power was again demonstrated in Luke 10:17-19. So where really was this power and authority He gave to them from? What was this power? It was the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1:8 tells that the disciples were to wait until they received **power** from on high, power that would only come when the Holy Spirit was living and dwelling inside of them.

Quite simply the Holy Spirit is to empower us to do the exploits which Jesus requires of us. Mark 16:15-18 gives us a clear picture of all the master requires of the pilgrim as he journeys down the pathway toward paradise and those are not feats the pilgrim can accomplish on his own hence the holy spirit's in-filling is most relevant.

We must at this point, before we further expatiate on the importance of the Holy Spirit, clear up a common misconception about receiving the Holy Spirit.

When we surrender to Christ at salvation's place we ask for him to come and indwell us and it is that same spirit who comes to take the seat of authority inside of us but we still need that which is referred to as the 'in-filling of the Holy Spirit'. Yes we are now Christians and have the Spirit of God dwelling in us but we still do need to be filled to overflow.

Let us consider a few examples

1. The disciples were given this authority at least twice (Luke 9:1-3 and Luke 10:17-18) still they still required the in-filling that occurred in Acts 2.

- Jesus himself breathed on them the Holy Spirit in John 20:22. That notwithstanding Jesus still left them the instruction in Acts 1:8 to wait for the Holy Spirit and power.
- Let us note that these disciples after these three experiences were found running away from Jesus (Mark 14:50, 52), denying him (Mark 14:68, 70, 71), going back to fishing (John 21:3). All of these changed however after the experience in Acts.

2. They became bold and ready to die for the cross and all it represents; they never again 'turned back'.

Cornelius was described as a devout man and God-fearing (Acts 10:1-5). He had a relationship with God such that his acts had been noticed. His prayers had been heard and were being answered, a feat reserved only for one who God 'knows' and is devoid of iniquity (John 10:14). Yet this man had not been filled with the Holy Spirit and that was what Peter was sent to bring to him and his family (Acts 10:44).

Being born again is not guarantee that we have this 'in-filling of the Holy

Spirit' which is very important. This is an experience the pilgrim cannot do without if he is to obey the master's command and do exploits. The difference in the lives of the apostles was clear following their encounter in Acts 2, Peter spoke with boldness of the one he had recently denied and denounced.

So how really does the Holy Spirit ensure we can do the will of the father-doing exploits?

- He confirms our salvations at those times when we may entertain doubt from the devil's whisperings in our ears. The Holy Spirit ensures that we know we are children of God (Romans 8:15-16, matt3:16-17), reminding us that we bear the God-nature and so are built for signs and wonders.
- He strengthens and comforts us (Acts 9:31)
- He counsels us (John 14:26 Holman Christian Standard Bible)
- He teaches us (John 14:26)
- He guides us (John 16:13)
- He serves as the link between us and God (our source) remember he will take from God and make it known to us. (John 16:15)

Receiving this in-filling has eluded many simply because they see it as a being for a select few. However we must remember that the Holy Spirit is a gift to all who believe. Again as we see in the case of Cornelius, no earth breaking, head-shaking, event was necessary to receive this fullness. A ready, receptive heart that acknowledges the need for this in-filling is all the pilgrim needs to receive the Holy Spirit.

Having been equipped with the Holy spirit's in-filling the pilgrim is ready to head out into the world, to traverse Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8) but he must know that in the world there are three things as are shown in 1John2:16.

- The lust of the eyes
- The lust of the flesh
- The pride of life

These three would constantly challenge the pilgrim through the journey along the path to paradise. These three are no stranger to humanity; they have been the very weapons of the tempter from the very beginning. In Genesis 3, the lust of the eye was Satan's weapon as he enticed Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. He made clear to her that it was fine and so would be good for food, this she later allured to. Satan also made eve touch the fruit which brought on the lust of the flesh and eventually the chance of being just like God brought on the pride of life, seeking equality with God and seeing nothing wrong with such a desire. It all began with the devil himself seeing God's position and lusting after it and eventually being taken over by pride so much that he would fight God for a chance to become God or at least like God. Man had always been faced with this challenge and the pilgrim is no exception.

The pilgrim thus needs to be prepared for these; let us digress to see how the pilgrim ensures readiness to face these three things which are constantly around him in the world.

Knowing that his struggle is not against physical powers/flesh and blood (Ephesians 6:12) pilgrim must put on the whole/complete/full/total armor provided by God who calls. By now the pilgrim already has on the helmet of salvation and the Holy Spirit along with His mighty sword and this is the starting point for pilgrim.

The sword of the spirit is the word of God which is described as being living and active/powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword ever known and able to divide soul from spirit, joints and marrow and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Hebrews 4:12). The

word is the single most powerful weapon in pilgrim's arsenal for defeating the world and its vices.

Paul would say to Timothy to study to prove himself a workman who needs not be ashamed... (Timothy 2:15).

We see Jesus's example to overcome these three arrows using the 'sword of the spirit' in Matthew 4.

- The lust of the flesh is exemplified by the devil tempting him with food for his hungry body (verse 3) Jesus' rebuttal in verse 4 was simply a recitation of the word from Deuteronomy 8:3
- The pride of life was his next attempt, trying to get Jesus to show off his incomparably great power in God but again Jesus had the word to counter the devil (verse 6, Deuteronomy 6:16)
- The lust of the eyes was the challenge in verses 8 and 9; good thing Jesus knew Exodus 20:3-5.

Two things are worthy of note here,

1. Jesus had the word inside of him. He was able to bring forth the right 'word' at each time to keep the devil at bay. We overcome the dragon/devil by the blood of the lamb and the words of our testimonies (Revelations 12:11); the word of God make up these testimonies by which we overcome. It is true that we are able to resist the devil and make him flee (or let us say, leave us for a time as in the case of Jesus in Luke 4:13) but we will fail at that if we do not have the word available to us. Only after battling with the word (sword of the spirit) was he able to dispatch the devil from his presence. Studying and meditating and internalizing the word of God are of grave importance if we are to succeed and truly overcome the devices of the enemies which are real and all around us. Jesus would say "the words I give you are spirit and they are life" (John 6:63). Without the word we have no life. Jesus was said to have baffled the Pharisees at the

age of twelve because he knew and understood the words of the ancient scrolls (now called the bible). Luke 2:46-49 shows us something really interesting. He Jesus was found among the teachers asking them questions; the young fellow wanted to learn as much as he could. Also he sounded surprised when his mother asked why he had 'punished' them. His response was a clear show of his passion, doing his father's business. He studied and was able to show himself as an approved workman when the temptation came.

2. Secondly we must note that the devil in tempting Jesus made use of the word too. However Jesus being full of it was able to discern the wrong application of the word and so was able to stand his ground. It is not enough to know the verses and commit them to memory, they must be a part of us, we must understand them and this only comes by meditating on them as we are directed to do in Joshua 1:8.

After this sword of the spirit comes the pilgrim's breast plate. It lies in front and is probably the first thing people would see on the pilgrim. This is his lifestyle. Pilgrim must live a life of righteousness. Just like Jesus, he must be in right standing with both God and man, able to find favor in their sight (Luke 2:52). Pilgrim will learn to follow peace with all men and righteousness without which he will never see God (Hebrews 12:14).

Pilgrim will learn to overcome lust and so treat younger women as sisters in all purity while overcoming pride of life by treating older women as mothers and older men as fathers who should not be rebuked but rather exhorted only (1 Timothy 5:2).

Pilgrim must remember at all times that the righteousness he can muster, even the best attempts are only like a filthy rag before the king of this paradise city where the journey ends. (Isaiah 64:6).

Still pilgrim would need to have his conversations be full of grace and seasoned with salt knowing how to answer everyone (Colossians 4:6) to ensure that he is of good report even

by those who see him.

Pilgrim is also given a responsibility to those who are yet to join the sojourn on the path to paradise. Pilgrim is to tell them of the gospel of peace so as to have them join in on the journey to paradise hence part of the armor is a gospel which are worn on the feet to show that it is taken whenever pilgrim goes.

Faith is the shield pilgrim needs to extinguish the fiery darts of lust and pride. Faith, that total unshakable knowledge of the existence of something/someone which is yet to be seen or felt or even experienced (Hebrews 11:1). It is the very thing pilgrim needs to please God (Hebrews 11:6) by believing that His God, the king in paradise does exist and he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him and complete the sojourn. Faith itself is the basis for the pilgrim's entrance into the journey; without faith, pilgrim would never have believed unto righteousness nor confessed unto salvation in the first place (Romans 10:10).

Great pilgrims of time past like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Rahab, Moses and many others had overcome the world and its vices with the shield of faith in hand (Hebrews 11).

Truth cannot be done away with if pilgrim will succeed. The truth really is the word of God which sanctifies (John 17:17).

Being fully girded for the journey ahead, pilgrim must understand the task ahead. Pilgrim is not only expected to wade through the battles and arrive at paradise. The master who has called pilgrim expects that he would obey his great commission along the journey. This commission is seen in Matthew 28:19-20 and reiterated in Mark 16:15-16; it is a call to spread the gospel (good news) of Jesus throughout the world. It is the prime reason for the in-filling with the Holy Spirit in the first place as seen in Acts 1:8b; "...then will you be my disciples in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and to the outermost parts of the earth".

Let us look at these critically in relation to the times we live in so as to realize the true importance of these gifts. Why are we granted these gifts in the first place? Though time and space are not in favor, let us make the space to explore some instances where these gifts were put to use in bible times and we will notice a common undertone to the events that followed their manifestation.

We have seen the churches get filled up with people who are in search of miracles or healing from one ailment or the other. This creates an avenue for the word of God to be preached to them for the salvation of their souls. The pilgrim who carries this gift of healing or the gift of performing miraculous signs is able to reach the unsaved with the message of Christ while granting them healing through the Holy Spirit's power. Time and time again we saw people in the New Testament ask to know who had brought about the healing they saw. The man born blind (John 9:10-15) from birth immediately became a witness and I believe souls were won over on that day as the people began to seek after the healer, Jesus. The invalid at the pool of Bethesda after being healed was asked the same (John 5:12). Peter and John had an avenue to win souls after they healed the lame man at the gate called beautiful in Acts 6:9-26. The people listened attentively though rather indignant but they listened all the same and many gave their lives to Christ on that day (Acts 4:4).

Prophecy which is a direct word from God has often times convicted people of their sins and so brought them to repentance. Again in our time, we see the fascination over prophecy, making the gatherings run by a prophet boom and overflow. This once again provides the pilgrim who has a prophetic ministry with an avenue to share the good news with the unbelievers who are drawn to him and his gifting. The interpretation of tongues, which is akin to prophecy, has similar fitting here.

As Apostle Paul stated in 1 Corinthians 14:21-22, speaking in tongues is a sign to the unbelievers.

A sign to the existence of the supernatural and a 'lure' for them to seek this 'supernatural' who has said that He would be found if He is sought with diligence. This again ensures that the gospel is made known to all for salvation's sake.

John 4 holds another interesting episode, Jesus' display of the gift of the word of knowledge and wisdom in verse 18 got the Samaritan woman's attention. She immediately believed in him and acknowledged him as a prophet (one sent of God). Furthermore she became a witness, reaching out to the village dwellers (verses 28 and 30). Her testimony to them was based on the gifting Jesus had manifested. The people who came confessed in verse 42 that they believed, that is to say they became followers of Christ (Christians). Believing is all we are asked to do so as to be saved after all (John 3:16) and these ones believed. Jesus was able to immediately discern the evil spirit inside of the man called legion and ensure his healing (Mark 5:1-20). Again Apostle Paul was able to discern the evil spirit inside of the girl who kept following him and thus he cast out the spirit (Acts 16:18). It took gift of discernment to realise that this spirit was not of God.

Repeatedly the gifts of the spirit were manifest among the Christians to ensure that their daily lives were made easier and particularly to ensure the gospel was spread and proven to be true and powerful. This really is the reason for us having been granted these gifts, as Paul mentioned, they all are for the common good of the church (1Corinthians 12:7). It is sad therefore to notice that sometimes these gifts become the main attraction and the bearer (the pilgrim) gets carried away by this gift and its wondrous manifestation while forgetting the purpose for which it was granted in the first place.

Finally before we move on let us be

reminded of Romans 10:14-15 which asks a few pertinent questions. In answer to these remember that (verse 15) as pilgrims, we have been sent and empowered too. Now it is left to us to go ahead and preach to 'them' so that 'they' hear, believe and become willing to call on God for salvation. All who call upon Him will be saved is His promise (Romans 10:13). Remember that after the great commission His instruction further was to wait for the empowerment to carry out the commission. This empowerment was the in-filling with the Holy Spirit with the accompanying gifting. Indeed the gifts of the Spirit are aimed primarily at spreading the gospel.

Now the pilgrim is fully armed to spread the gospel, he has the Holy Spirit fully functional within. Here is something else which may not have taken any special effort but will clearly be noticed in this new creature (2Corinthians 5:17) the pilgrim became when he started off the journey to paradise. He began to bear certain fruit stated in Galatians 5:22-23. These have become his new character and are described as the fruit of the regenerated spirit the pilgrim now is and has. Many have tried to draw a line between the fruit and the gifts, claiming the one to be greater than the other especially after considering Paul's expose in 1Corinthians 13 but lets us leave the controversy just yet and focus on these fruit.

First I want us to notice that though nine characteristics are mentioned, they all are referred to as fruit not fruits. They all come in one package. One cannot be said to truly have been regenerated and be patient and yet still have no love or be gentle and not be meek or to have joy and not have peace. It is a single package; the fruit of the spirit.

Secondly, if we travel to John 15 we find Jesus teaching us that we are the branches of a vine which

He is. We are expected to bear fruit. These are a class of the fruit we are required to bear. Jesus in John 15 leaves us no choice but to bear fruit as such for those who do not bear fruit will be cut off (verse 2) and tossed into the fiery furnace for eternal destruction, signifying hell fire (verse 6). Bearing fruit had never been a big deal for any branch that remains attached to the tree and the same applies here as Jesus stresses in verses 4 and 5. Once again let us note that Jesus speaks of fruit not fruits.

Furthermore about the fruit which the pilgrim is bearing, love seems to stand out and though they all are in one package having and showing love seems like the one to ensure all others show forth. See 1Corinthians 13 vs. Galatians 5:22-23; love implies kindness (love is kind), long suffering (love is patient), faithfulness (love never fails, love always trusts), goodness (does not delight in evil), joy (rejoicing in the truth), peace, gentleness and self-control (love is not easily angered). Indeed love is the greatest of all and having love ensures all of the fruit become evident. This should not be a surprise to us after all God is Love. Having God is the one way to be like Him.

The fruit is to be the new lifestyle of the pilgrim; this life is now one of love, joy peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, self-control, faithfulness and goodness. It is worthy of note that a branch is expected to effortlessly bear fruit. The branch is not expected to pretend to have fruit or to have difficulty with bearing fruit, the same applies to the pilgrim; so long as the spirit within has been regenerated, bearing fruit should be easy and automatic. There should/ would be no pretense about it whatsoever. The fruit show up without the pilgrim needing to give it a second thought most times. However at certain times the pilgrim will have to make particular effort to be patient or gentle or to live out certain fruit

which are being tried or tested at that time.

Also let us note that these fruit identify the pilgrim as a Jesus follower and so also point the world to Jesus. Testimonies abound of how people have been led to take a decision for Christ after carefully studying the life of a pilgrim who bore the fruit of the spirit as such.

If we may move on now for the sake of space we shall consider yet another matter of import along the voyage if the pilgrim is ever to arrive at the 'pearly gates'.

Apostle Paul said these words loaded with wisdom; "...I pray more than all of you..." The need for prayers cannot be over-emphasized as it remains the connection between the pilgrim and the one who called him. Remember the words in Jn15; he who does now abide is thrown into the fire. The only assurance of ever finishing the journey lies in remaining a part of the vine. This is ensured by maintaining communion with the vine (source). This communication happens at the place of prayer and study. A lot has been said already about the need for the pilgrim to study the word of God so we shall focus on prayers now.

Jesus who was God himself maintained an open line with God at all times. He was always Praying, he prayed when all was well (when he prayed over food in John 6:11), when he needed encouragement (at Gethsemane in Matt 26:38-39), when he wanted to save his friends (in John 17). He even said to Peter that he had prayed for him (Luke 2:32). One would expect that the one with all the power would probably have promised Peter a few angels to keep him safe and from falling and patted him on the shoulder saying 'worry not man, I am in charge so all is well'. Rather His assurance to Peter was that He had prayed for him.

Prayer truly is the key, the portal to

reaching God. Let us note that though it is useful to be locked up in our closet as Jesus prescribed (Matthew 6:6), prayer is not restricted to such times alone. It simply is communicating with God seeing as he has called us to be his friends and no longer slaves (1Ephesians 2:19, Romans 8:17). We should make prayer as straightforward as making a phone call to a friend. Prayer should not be seen only as an avenue to ask or request but as a portal for staying in touch and keeping tabs with each other (God and us). Prayer should be the way we check to see if we are in God's will and how we update him on all that goes on around and with us, not as though he doesn't already know but because He enjoys and requests such fellowship with us. Remember that in the beginning God would come down in the cool of the evening to fellowship with man (Genesis 3:8).

In the busy schedule of pilgrims today, prayers have become relegated to the background, happening only at the start and end of meetings and maybe when a meal is placed before us. Paul though busy with writing letters, preaching and traveling, making tents, going back and forth between prison cells, whip lashes and ship wrecks still made prayers a part of his life so much so that he prayed more than his 'children'.

Briefly pause and consider the nature of your relationship with a friend when you lose touch and haven't spoken in days. You might have seen each other every day, been in the same building (place of work or study) but not getting a chance to talk together and truly communicate immediately makes you somewhat estranged from each other. It is the same with the pilgrim and God, being at all the fellowship meetings and bible studies are not nearly enough if the pilgrim and God are not able to spend time ALONE together often/ every day.

Time and time again Jesus was

noted to have reclined to a quiet place to pray. Prayer fuels the spirit man, re-energises us to do more for God. It is a meeting place between the pilgrim and God, an altar and hence a place to be empowered and re-empowered. This brings us to the last issue we shall discuss here, the need for re-empowerment.

Several times in the book of Acts it is stated that the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit. It becomes clear that they were not filled only once. After the encounter on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 they were filled again and again. It is on this basis that we are often reminded that the anointing from yesterday is stale and not good enough for today. It is necessary that the pilgrim get a 'top-up' ever so often to ensure that the vessel is filled to the brim and overflowing at all times. Acts 4:8, Acts 6:5, 8, 7:55, all speak of the men of God being full of the spirit/power. It was only operating under such filling that they were able to do such exploits as they did. The pilgrim simply cannot do without total reliance on the Holy Spirit, this is an incontrovertible truth.

There are no shortcuts and no easier paths to reach paradise, some had been so deceived and forgot the truth; that 'narrow is the gate and difficult is the way that leads to life and few find it' (Matthew 7:14) and so they have sought alternate routes and ended up at alternate locations. Though repentance is possible, the time spent is irreplaceably lost.

Paul's advice to the pilgrim after doing this much to stand is rather fitting at this point. He says: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty where with Christ has set us free", knowing this "that God's solid foundation stands firm with this seal, the Lord knows those who are His" and to them he has promised to "complete the good work He has so started until the day of Jesus Christ". (Galatians 5:1, 2Timothy 2:19, Philippians 1:6). **Maranatha** ■



COME, LORD JESUS!

By Bro Clinton David

"He which testifieth these things saith, surely I come quickly, Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus". Rev.22:20

The words in this text is one that struck my heart the very moment the Lord brought it to me, and as I shall be pondering on the very words that framed this scripture, it is my sincere heart cry that the Spirit of God would very much impinge them on your mortal soul to the intent that all your very being be gloriously illuminated unto the day of our Lord, Amen.

Again it is also pertinent to mention that many people actually do pray and behind such prayers are intents-whether godly or ungodly. Also such prayers could carry along with some godly or ungodly passions. Some may in praying say 'come Lord and assuage the oppression of my foes and end this terror of sin and of darkness'; such could ask these in prayer not from an outburst of a burdened heart or from an absolutely disgusted state of sin or yet jaded with all forms of unrighteousness. Such words may have stem from an imposed burden from another, probably because the pastor had asked that you pray in such a manner. Some may have asked these in prayer for some immediate personal gain, not because you truly desired your Lord to come, knowing assuredly well how unprepared you are to meet the saviour. It is for this unpreparedness that one in praying for the dying sick would rather consider a swift restoration to former health

than the fact that such an one is a second lost into eternity. So that even that fellow becomes repulsive to being confronted with facts of eternity, he would have you only prayed for recovery. Some passersby or standing by would chuckle and others murmur as though it was a strange subject, yet it is a matter of absolute urgency for the soul.

Hence it behooves me to consider why Brother John would accord so stringent an attention to a matter of much neglect amongst present believers.

I shall however discuss the above text within the context of these subtitles;

- The circumstances surrounding the above prayer.
- The passion that lies therein.
- The relevance in the above prayer.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING THE PRAYER

"...Even so, come, Lord Jesus" were the prayers from the heart of our brother John. Such a sober prayer of the soul could not have come from an unprepared heart or from lips service. He could not have come to such resolute and stern point if he is without an understanding of what such coming of his Lord meant. The eagerness with which those prayers

were offered could not restrain him alerting us of that blessed desire. It was indeed a prayer borne out of an earnest need for something which may be absent presently. The prefix 'even so' reflects the magnitude of the consent to the prayer. He was not in any way opposed to his Lord's desire to come. He was not troubled in heart if his Lord will fulfill that blessed promise in no time. He was truly overwhelmed, and would wish if probably to enter at that very moment into that day of his Lord. He would not consider a further procrastination of the day his Lord had often reiterated. He was overcome by that brief moment that burst on his sight, and would not let go for a moment what he so beheld. The marvelous things he beheld would swiftly snatch away the many persecutions he had undergone. His heart became filled with that glorious encounter so much so that there was indeed no more breath in him, no more the desire to stay back on earth, no more the allurements to earthly things, and not a little desire to continue without that ever abiding presence of his Saviour.

At the beginning of John's encounter he fell at his Lord's feet as dead when he saw Him in His glory. Here in the concluding verses of his revelation, he became another man so much so that all that is within him was crying and saying "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

The Lord's constant reiteration of the subject of His return alarmed John's

understanding. Many years before this encounter had the Lord rehearsed the subject until the day he was taken away from them. Most probably the life of John may have ended without a better grasp of some very issues the Lord had before talked about. Hence the coming again in this encounter and the elaboration of the weight of the said matter left John doubtless and moved to but pray in the manner he did. Now also same subject profoundly dominated the entirety of the revelation brought to him. The Lord had from the onset of the encounter revealed the churches lack of preparation for the day, and sent several warnings of alarm. The Lord had also made mention of the preparation for that day by the heavenly host. The manner at which this came was as though that was all that heaven is preparing for. It was as though no other subject was ever discussed in heaven but the issues of that day. Heaven too appears spellbound and its host eagerly waiting that great day. He had also brought to Brother John what and what would precede the day; the troubles and the anguish upon the world of sinners. The often reiteration of the sorrows that would befall sinners was heavy upon John's heart. Christ himself did not in any way consider of little importance the issues. His countenance all through this encounter impaled John's heart to the intent that he could only pray a singular prayer, which also became the concluding message of the life he lived. Every page of the encounter was focused on one issue so that no other matter could at the moment occupy his heart. Could John be so indifferent to the plight of sinners to have prayed in such a manner even when his Lord had revealed their unpreparedness? Did he well comprehend the magnitude of the destruction that awaits these sinners everywhere? Oh had he wanted their punishment to come swiftly on them having in mind his mortal sufferings in their cruel hands? Let's peruse through those words again: *"He who testifieth these things saith, surely I come quickly..."* Indeed John was not praying for self gratification or as a need for vengeance on his persecutors. It was actually a prayer in cognizance

of his Lord's desire to come. It was a prayer in line with the Lord's will. The Lord too desires to come, and to come quickly. He would not delay any punishment due to sinners. He would come quickly to wipe the tears from the eyes of his suffering servants, who have paid for Him such an ultimate price. He would not delay again those who cry from under the altar saying 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth'. So John's prayer was actually in accordance to his Lord's will. But here John prays alone. He was alone bothered. He was alone praying the Lord's will. The others who are named by the Lord's name have gone after strange flesh and are now pursuing things of mundane. Some would pray and say "Lord, don't come now until I have become so and so in this world". So truly John prays alone for the fulfillment of his Lord's will. The Lord is in wait to come, and to come quickly so as to end this evil reign and enthrone forever righteousness. Yes, you have become lukewarm now and have sold your first love to the pursuit of worldliness. The only prayer from your lips is 'Lord, give me this and that'. Your eyes have become laden with earthly things only, and daily that is what keeps you running around, from pillar to post. "I too I must make it in life..." seems to be your slogan. But there is a serious injunction which I would you consider with me as the Spirit helps us through these pages. One is that the Lord is in wait to come, and to come quickly. The unpreparedness of the sinner would not stay His coming. The lukewarmness and the prayerlessness of believers would not deter Him. He is prepared and would come suddenly.

The Lord's emphasis on the subject was worrisome to John. The Pharisees do not bother with such subject and as well the Jews. The churches too had forgotten this subject, and even with some sort of laxity when preached. So much was the matter urgent to the Lord that he had to write to the churches a letter of alarm as a reminder of the day they have all not prepared for. Some were already engaged in issues of

position and hierarchy, and some had gone to employ Jezebel into the priesthood office to teach and seduce God's servants. Hence just like their teacher these servants of the Lord whom he purchased with his blood are now gone a fishing after materialism and found wanting in all sorts of immorality. Some were already thinking that worldly riches and wealth was paramount, despising their spiritual decay. It was true that they had forgotten their Lord doth come. But here the Lord was very emphatic. He had while on earth shared with them the many mansions above, and he again revealed the several rewards on that day.

The handling of the subject by the Lord impressed upon Brother John its importance above any other in scripture. So much so that it became his sole prayer. The very issues that preoccupied his master now occupy his very being. The Lord would even on a dining table rehearse the matter as he would in a prayer forum. There was no secluded moment in which such thoughts would be brought to fore. It was the sermon, it was the encouragements, it was the counsels, it was the parables, it was the rebukes, and it was the songs and hymnodies. Just after the resurrection the Lord met the disciples at the sea of Tiberias and the focus of their discussion was nothing less than his return so that every statement was punctuated by this. The Lord thus bringing the same matter even after many years was indeed for a heart searching. So for John rather than being befogged by the thoughts of those cruel persecutions, he was in ecstasy of his Lord's return. Infact there was no personal accounts from John narrating in detail any of such ordeals of cruelty from his persecutors. The stories about the persecutions he underwent which were documented for this age were not a matter to John; hence such details would have filled the book of Revelation. Even those disciples who did so had only few verses of scripture to discuss such details. It was nothing compared to the magnitude of the sufferings their Lord underwent for them all. The Moravian Missionary Movement

thrived on those words from Brothers John L. Doper and David Nitschman who soled themselves into slavery for the salvation of others- 'May the Lamb that was slain receive the reward of His sufferings'. To them no price was worth the sufferings of Christ. However before we proceed, let's rehearse the first stanza of Isaac Watts hymn:

*When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my
pride.*

"...Surely, I come quickly" – Let us take some moments to meditate on these words before we go on to draw any form of elaboration. I pray sincerely that your salvation would be ignited with fresh fire from on high from this point forward. I see why Brother John could start his prayer with 'even so' that is exemplifying no contradiction or argument to the Lord's will. 'Surely', meaning without your negotiation or consent. So Christ needed not to wait for your preparedness. He needed not that you pray him to come. He would come whether you are prepared or not. The present forgetfulness of His coming would not deter Him. The length of time is nothing of note for he would surely come just at the appointed hour. Also 'surely' meant there is an appointed hour and that the arrangements were already perfected. Your seeming unpreparedness would not stay his coming; hence he would come at a day you look not for Him. So could it be that a day would pass that you look not for him? Alas beloved, how terrible is that day. Oh how I pray that the glimpse of my saviour on the skies beyond, no other attraction would snatch from my eyes in my daily pilgrim walk. Though some may dwell where such attractions abound, my constant aim is on higher grounds beyond the skies. Though friends may forsake me and family ties are loosed my gaze on my saviour I would not compromise. Also

"surely" could mean the Lord's unwillingness to disappoint such men like John who have laboured for Him. It is an assurance of coming to reward his disciples. No wonder he had told them some time ago: let not your heart be troubled for I have prepared for you many mansions. He buttressed further: eyes have not seen, ears have not heard nor has it entered into the hearts of men what God has prepared for them who love Him. So the expression 'surely' was an affirmation of the promises above herein. Such was great consolation to Brother John so that his sufferings became quite inconsequential. He could not have prayed saying 'Lord, please for the sake of that sinner man stay thy coming'. He could not in any way come to love the unrepentant sinner beyond his saviour. So if his Lord says 'I come quickly', knowing yet some sinners unrepentant, it is because their length of time for repentance is strained and he would not for them postpone his return. Hence he would come upon them suddenly. He had told the church of Ephesus, I would come to you suddenly and take away from you your candle stick. The matter is more grievous and urgent than you think it to be. Thus for this nonchalance you could behave yourself unseemly thinking the Lord himself was mistaken knowing prior the state of things and the wretchedness of man to continue in evil, so that although you are now born again your heart still swerves between Christ and the world. Though you seem to profess salvation, your heart is undecided. The present world appears to you more real and you have thought to yourself, He would surely come at my swiftest hour. He would consider my labours and come at the hour I am most prepared. Some, who had thought they would surely escape that great damnation of hell, only came to its shores unawares. Fore they woke from their slumber their feet like a robot were dragged to that dreaded pit. Also those ten virgins while they fell asleep the bridegroom called. Though for

some it was the weariness of the physical body, for others it was a spiritual slumber. Despite their religious sanctity-virgins, they were unprepared for their Lord's return. Awake from thy slumber beloved! Let us pray!

THE PASSION THAT LIES THEREIN

Several persons have prayed and used certain words without the slightest presence of any little passion. Some have for the sake of not being indifferent appear to make certain pronouncements just to please men around. 'Even so, come, Lord Jesus' were the prayers of our brother in tribulation. He had not prayed this prayer from a rising from dinner nor from some fanfare. It was a prayer borne out of a seeming state of despondency which most believers fear to come to in their walk to Zion city. He was in total agony of soul and had not enjoyed for a moment any earthly encouragement. However here he thirsts for the coming righteousness and hungers to see his long awaited Lord. He was not willing to compromise any more brief moment on earth despite the side attractions to mundane for an eternity with his Saviour. You may be so accustomed to praying for financial breakthroughs because you are inept materially or yet felt you need more than your present possessions. Some would think to themselves that God has done them a disservice when they compare themselves to others, and would trouble heaven for some urgent earthly satisfaction. I would not deny you of your right to such enjoyments, but watch, your heart has lost the Saviour! Should not Brother John be entitled to his own enjoyments also, but his heart has no desire to stay where such abounds, he wants a translation to a greater glory. All that he desires now is nothing more than his Lord. You may be running from one convention to another and when confronted you may say 'I am looking for my Saviour', and then

here at last you find him. Then suddenly you continue running again leaving the Saviour behind and running so hastily as though to catch up with something greater but alas it is for material and fading glory. You have now left the Lord whom you claim to be pursuing and have gone another journey. Sometimes I wonder what you are still pursuing if truly you have caught the Saviour. Beloved all this running of yours, what is it for? I had thought from scriptures that all the running ends when you find Jesus. This is why when you meet a young believer in conversation, you would notice that those who seem to inspire him are men who know not the Lord but for their wealth and fame. Even his church elders are nothing to him. It is because they are devoid of that heavenly life that could pierce the heart of that young soul. Worst still his so called inspirers are also the references on pulpit sermon, so that that young soul is left with nothing but vanity, and his Christ hoarded. So for Brother John to pray in such a manner even from a state of great suffering in the hands of his persecutors was because he had long died to the world and lives only to behold his Christ. To him nothing was more satisfying and encouraging than to behold Him who was pierced. So, passing exams and getting some good job was nothing as amounting to joy but the sight of his Saviour on the skies above.

Again he was tired of the conversations of wickedness and sin, he longed for righteousness. He desires to give up sin and its temporal benefits. He wants a heavenly heritage. Though the world would offer him its fading glories, but he would neither of such.

See 2 Pet.3:12-13 "Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

To the apostles of those days, the desire to meet their Lord was an utmost search and hastiness within

their soul. It was a single expectation and that only preoccupies their heart. They needed that righteousness would come suddenly. So just like Brother John they were tired of seeing wickedness and prayed that it would vanish away even at the appearance of their Saviour. Indeed blessed are they who do hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. They knew that the end of sin is at the appearance of the Lord, and so they hungered that he would come now. They were looking for righteousness. They were looking for new heavens and a new earth where righteousness abounds. Dearly be-loved what would we see when we look deeply into your heart? All these years that you have been following Jesus, what is it that you are looking for? Sometimes all that you pray for, that seems to dominate your prayers is it not for money? All this working and praying is it not for money? All this sacrifices and labours are they not for some earthly promotions? Who has bewitched you? Someone stands praying saying 'Lord, this is my tithe, as I give it to you now, give me -so and -so...' Who amongst the holy apostles ever desired that such be his lot in offering such the like unto the Saviour? Let us look at the scripture again, Looking for and hasting unto... see the urgency in those words. They were looking for the Lord's Day as though it were a missing item that must be sought after. Their words, songs and messages were all driven by this search. You could see it in every moment of their lives, and even the epistles were a show piece of what was the fulcrum of their pursuit. Some of them were in this state of mind and preoccupation for sixty years. Some of them had this as a slogan in their entire earthly walk. Some of them only knew this from the day they got born again till their mortal bodies were consumed. I have served God for barely twenty years, and yet just within a short time should I get so wearied and frustrated forgetting the stone were I was hewn? Just five years old salvation and you are already tired of looking for the Saviour. Now your prayers are all filled with 'give me this and that' as though God were

indebted to you. I see you run from church to church looking for and hasting unto some material benefits. All you want now is money and nothing more. Sometime ago we went for missions, and needed to use a table for few hours so we reached out to a villager for his table. So he offered us an old table at a price of one hundred naira. This is why you too would run around collecting monies everywhere as though it ends with that. You can even dedicate a service or crusade to talk about money as though God needed money to sponsor his work. Yes although God would need money but he is never restrained at any time. There is nothing impossible with Him. He can save souls without spending a dime. From time immemorial the issue has never been money but labourers. If He can find men, there would be a way in the wilderness, and the harvest would come.

The desire that the Lord would come quickly even as he has promised filled Brother John's mortal soul to the intent he prayed in that manner, even so, come, Lord Jesus. He would that judgment should come swiftly upon the wicked and that the world of sinners ends immediately. He would not that they prolong their evil deeds any longer. He was tired of the reign of wickedness and wants the eternal judge to quickly come and take away their place. He cannot in any way endure the wicked for a moment. He looks for judgment to come. He would that his persecutors end their terror upon holy servants. They have held unto certain positions for a while and he knew that the appearance of the Saviour would bring an end to their empire. These have withstood the gospel of Jesus Christ and hindered the salvation of men, so he desires judgment upon them.

See Acts.24:25 "And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee."

The men of old who followed Jesus knew that there is no mercy for the wicked and no hope for sinners. They

knew the magnitude and heaviness of the judgment to come, and that none shall be spared who neglects so great a salvation. Such that when Brother Paul reasoned and discussed the weightiness of that judgment, kings trembled and fell on their knees. The sight of that fiery trial of sinners was never undermined by the apostles. They knew it would be a wonder moment the world has never beheld. So that if such were to appear at the funeral of a sinner, it would be a catastrophe of language. I once attended the funeral of a man who had died in sin and a pastor was asked to preach. I observed that all that the preacher focused on was the punishment of those presumed to have killed the man. Little did he know that some of us who stood there knew a few things that may have occasioned the death, nonetheless the preacher clung to seeing the killers dead too despising the question of eternity for the already dead and the living dead. He undermined the weightiness of the coming fiery trial of judgment and rather drove his audience to baseless issues. Brother Paul having a thorough unbiased view of the subject was never distracted by the apparent greatness of those rulers who sat to listen. He knew their fate and knew God would not for a moment spare them. Moreover the inclination and sole disposition to wanting that judgment to quickly come was great wonder and terror upon such kings. The sinner has no other option when he considers that fiery trial of judgment and would hide himself from God's presence. Day and night all that beckons on his heart is that judgment cometh upon him. He cannot walk into a church auditorium thinking to donate huge sum of money when judgment lurks around him. He would that the matter of his salvation be settled foremost before he discusses another matter. You could pray and say 'Lord, bless -so and -so' forgetting that upon such would judgment come swiftly if he repents not. There is no blessing or reward of good for the wicked except he turns from his ways and seek the Lord. Brother Cain had prayed and desired good from the Lord, but his offering was rejected and so he was wroth. The

Lord replied him and said 'Why are thou wroth? And why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shall thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at thy door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.' You know if such a brother had met you after such an event, oh' you would have said 'it is well, God shall still bless you' and despising an unsettled matter of his salvation. They desired judgment not because they hated sinners and would they perish immediately, but that righteousness would come as judgment ends the dominion of sin. It was not about the sinners but rather the reign of sin. Now see how many more years it has taken since such a prayer was offered, waiting peradventure for another sinner to turn from his wicked ways. Should judgment come ere such sinner repent, it was because the hour was overstrained.

The apostles desired also to see an end of sickness and death. They wanted their Lord to come remembering what he had promised about the heavenly home. They knew his appearance would usher in an end of pain and sorrow. Oh they knew such would sleep no more who died in the Lord. They had an expectation of living in that heavenly bliss and enjoying that awesome life. There was indeed none on earth that can liken such a life. So it was an utmost desire of their soul. The mortal life was to them empty and hopeless. They desired a better life and a better home where dwelleth righteousness. Brother John hoped to see an end of suffering at the appearance of his Lord, and so he cried, even so, come my Lord. The anguish of his tribulations and the sight of his glorious king were unmatched.

"By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith." Heb.11:7

Here we see just in same manner Noah being told of the coming destruction of sinners, and the

promptness with which he had handled the subject. He did not consider God's instruction as irrelevant or impotent. He stood out and condemned the world and all its fleeting pleasures. He was tired of the world and in continuing in its affairs. He desired a better home whose builder and maker is God, and just like Abraham, he needed a city with foundations. He knew the world is passing, and would endure only a moment, so he yearned for a better country. He condemned the world and despised all its attractions. He neglected those who scorned and despised him for his choice. He despised all manner of friendship with the world, and would not for one friendship of man; desire any compromise against his saviour. He despised those who by familiarity had wielded all right to persuade him against the contrary and consented to run alone to Zion city. He was undaunted though none of the people of the world had agreed that destruction lucks. He condemned the world in hope for a better country.

So John's passion rest in the understanding of what is to come and concerning such passion most are indigent. Some believers would fight and struggle for some family rights and entitlements. You see them fight in their neighborhoods over nothing. Some of them would fight during church congresses and meetings over nothing. I remember how some brethren stood to abuse a brother in a church conference, as though it was a political organization. The words in use too were not a semblance of believers, and as I sat were I was these were the thoughts that occupied my heart. I was troubled. Some of such may have come up even after a wonderful message so to speak and I kept wondering what could be going on. When you even come into such places, the manner in which another brother would snub the other and shout him down, you imagine what could be the issue. Indeed most of the times nothing but a struggle for relevance and self affirmation. Now no matter what was in the world that people clamour and wrestle with all their might, Noah was not moved but

condemned them all. He was in need of nothing more but righteousness to come.

Some would trade their salvation for some certain pleasure or yet some form of immediate satisfaction. That is the reason you see students engage in all manner of compromise to secure academic success. Businessmen, who are professed believers, would say 'please, this is business', just to engage in ungodliness. So if you want to venture into the business world as a fervent believer, some seemingly wise 'worldly-wise' would sit you down and say 'now that you are ready, do bear in mind that this is now business; no one ever makes it by obeying rules and principles.' It is for the same immediate pleasure that you see young believers engaged for marriage, found in all sorts of filthiness of the flesh and spirit. Some would say 'I know we shall get married soon, but let's have some brief pleasure.' Nonetheless whether there be pleasure or not, Noah condemned all that lies in them. When John said 'come, Lord Jesus', it was because he was ready to give up the world. He was tired of continuing in its fleeting pleasures and if at all he had wings to fly, he would have flown away. Some of you live as though to continue here forever, but here we have no continuing city. Those believers if they were mindful of where they came would have had opportunity to return, but they needed a better home, where God would be called their father.

"For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself."
Phil 3:20-21

The apostles were always filled with the thoughts of meeting their saviour. How could they be bodily present on earth and yet filled with that heavenly bliss. It was indeed heaven on earth. If these men had any such privilege of treading both heaven and earth at same time

while still living in mortality, they would have gone looking the streets for their saviour. Oh, what a saviour! I have tried to consider what fellowship they had enjoyed with Him and needed that such is unbroken. What seems to appeal to their hearts was nothing more than the saviour. The meeting with their saviour was their sermon all day long. Some sang it as a repetitive phrase in their hymns. Oh how awesome it was for them to meet their saviour who was pierced for them. Their day to day conversation was about the subject of heaven, and for this had no little pleasure or satisfaction in the world. The world was to them dead and none existent. They were looking for the saviour. They rejoiced to see when immortality shall swallow up mortality. They desired to be clothed with that glorious body of Christ.

Now you cannot say 'I am looking for the saviour' when you are married to the world and have wallowed in its pleasure. I had attended a convention some time ago whose theme was 'Behold He cometh'. The first day was an exposition of the subject and listening to the preacher I had no little promptings of a coming King, I thought the theme was redressed behind doors. I had also hoped that the days coming shall rather do justice to the theme. But as one preacher came and left, the matters being presented were either marriage or making your business work. Later it was business forum and next was career choices. It was indeed the reflection of a church who has never sought for their saviour. Even though you could pretend about the matter, the few seconds for a litmus test would show all that you truly are. You would look for everything on earth but not the saviour, and though that appears to be the subject focus in conventions popularly called, yet the inclination to flesh and its worldly cravings would not allow the soul some little moment to grasp the reality. You would discover you have never sought for the saviour, even your dreams every night could reflect that. I once had a discussion with some staff at my place of work, and as I had pondered on the urgency of

the subject, one said to me, but at least my pastor mentions it once upon a time. Could a mere mention of facts save a wretch from the coming fires? Could a lackadaisical approach of a matter of such unequalled magnitude save a backslider from his folly? Do you mention it to fulfill all righteousness, preacher?

Brother Paul said 'we are looking for the saviour who would change our vile body'. He was speaking the state of mind of all the apostles who were then present. Every day was for them a new search and their eyes were rested on this alone. If the Lord had come suddenly upon such believers, how great is the harvest of the earth. Peradventure one of these was in a classroom or attending to business, he was in readiness for the coming saviour, and would not be taken unawares. Now shall a preacher be on pulpit and yet be taken unawares? Yet more in this present state and location of yours, would you be taken unawares? Dearly beloved may I ask you from my bedroom though absent from you in the flesh, are in you in readiness now, even in this present preoccupation of yours? Again are you in search for the saviour or presently upbeat about some mundane appearance? Are your thoughts and dreams in disarray, probably owing to some unnecessary inclusions in the heart? How would you be taken unawares if your heart is constantly searching for the saviour, but it is because you never sought for him. Some people got born again after a sermon, and immediately troubled with some issues, so they wait to speak with the preacher. At inquiry some would ask for deliverance from a witch or from some certain spirit of poverty. Alas the preacher would exert all energies in the pursuance of nothing but vanity. Christ was never the subject, but rather all that grants bodily satisfaction. I should have asked if you truly sought for the saviour. Some, who needed deliverance from a witch so called, are laden with all forms of sins and unrighteousness, yet what seems paramount to you is first deliverance from what you have already overcome, than the true liberty of

the soul. Oh how I pray from my searching desk that the Lord would not come upon you unawares. Please join me to pray for some few moments before we proceed.

THE RELEVANCE IN THE ABOVE PRAYER

The prayer of Brother John depicts his level of preparedness for that hour and probably that of fellow believers. Let us see the scriptures again;

"He which testifieth these things saith, surely I come quickly, Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus". Rev.22:20

Now he could not have said 'even so' when he is yet unprepared especially knowing well the woes that shall befall those unprepared. He had prayed from a state of readiness and would not be surprised if his Lord appears in a moment. His soul was already raptured within him and though present in the body but absent in the spirit. The confidence expressed in the prayer reflects that he was indeed ready. He needed not that new prayers of repentance and sanctification be offered hitherto he meets his Lord, but was absolutely ready. Could this be self sufficiency or yet self righteousness? Could John's prayer be an expression of boastfulness? Now imagine a brother in such tribulation, consider also his pains and the cloud of despair around him, and also his aged body being challenged with all manner of cruelty. Should not such a fellow if it were possible for him to quickly appear in his Lord's presence, if that would end his travail. Also could these prayers ooze from the burden of suffering? So to mean that if he were in some form of enjoyment or pleasure, he could have said 'Lord, please delay thy coming'. However before we take up some of these queries, may I draw your attention to an event that happened sometime ago. It was a trip embarked upon by some young believers who were going for a convention. As the journey lasted, a brother began to sing; He's coming back again, my Lord is coming back again. He went away and promised, he's coming back again...so some others interjected and said 'He cannot come now because I am yet to finish my ministry'. Another said: I have to marry first before he comes. Again another, I have to build a house and buy my own car. For these brethren,

these seems to be the reason they would want their Lord to delay his coming, and it could portend that though they would want to enjoy the benefits of his coming, their love for him is not as compared to those reasons for which they would want his coming postponed. They love his rewards but not him. Again, if the Holy Spirit were to gaze into your heart right now, what would he see as a reason to delay the Lord's coming? Could it be some unfinished pleasure? Or some besetting sins unnamed? So those young brothers who prayed and said, Lord delay thy coming, could they be at that moment in any state of pleasure or suffering? You would understand that some even though to be in a state of suffering, would ask the Lord to stay his coming pending when their days of enjoyment would come. Also others who peradventure could be in a state of pleasure would demand for further extension of the pleasure days. So whether it is suffering or pleasure, that could not be the ignition of Brother John's prayer. Let us see I Corinthians chapter nine verses twenty-four to twenty-seven:

"Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away."

The confidence with which the apostles expected the saviour shows that indeed they had ran well, and are sure the Lord would not deny them of their reward. They were indeed truly prepared to meet their saviour. Brother Paul was not uncertain of his walk, he was prepared. See the excerpts' from the above... I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air. He was sure to have met the needed requirements. You may pray and say 'Lord, I do not know if I have done well, I do not know if I shall be received at your coming, please just show me mercy'. Some do pray in this manner while laying wreaths for the dead: please Lord, no matter what he has done forgive him and receive him into your presence. You cannot come to an interview and say: please

sir, I am aware you requested for my degree but I am yet to pass my University Matriculation Exams. It then means you are already disqualified and cannot be enrolled. So if time lingers and you know you are already disqualified, what would you do beloved? Would you wait like the five foolish virgins till the night cry, when time shall be no more? You must be sure of your marks and know if you are running outside the tracks. Again if another say: Lord, I have done all that is required of me and have walked in your footsteps, please show me mercy at thy return; such only leans on the trust of his Lord's judgment having done well his part, and that requested of him. So Brother John was sure to have run according to the rules. He knew his Lord's will and has done so absolutely. Up until now when we are nearer our redemption, some of you are still between two opinions, you are yet confused, you do not know if you have done right or wrong, and rest in whatever portion of judgment befalls you. No beloved, you cannot run uncertainly or as one beating the air. Judge yourself before the true Judge appears. Do not be pretentious about an issue that concerns your eternity. If you belong to an assembly that do not know if they will meet their saviour or not, then you must look for your escape fore it is late. Some years ago I was helping to nurture one in the faith and he did quite well over time. After a moment of intermission, I had visited with him to know his present state, but it was unfortunate, I met him on the bed of fornication. So I was wrought, and I inquired what may have transpired. He said to me: once upon a time I was passing by a street when I ran into the youth president of my church, who was just returning from visiting with his girlfriend. So I challenged him, he continued, and he said to me do not mind those believers, they are only deceptive because everyone actually does it and lives in immorality. So I said within my heart probably Brother Clinton also does it, and settling on this, I came to this ungodly path. Oh if I had opportunity to have met that youth president I would have said to him: thou hypocrite, deceiving ignorant young believers. If you are not sure of your salvation, then you were never born again. If you think you are sure but not sure of meeting the saviour, then you have backslided. Would you not my beloved tarry a little here in prayer until the darkness is past and its scroll rolled away. Would you

not please kneel in prayer until the light breaks forth again?

The disciples were too ecstatic in meeting their saviour, which reflects a state of utmost readiness. This also shows that these men had completely walked in the Lord's will. There were no sins to hide and no hypocrisies. There was no little fear of being rejected at the appearance of their Lord. They had desired to see Him who was pierced for them and were in joy of expectation full of glory. Most times when something awful unexpectedly surfaces to take your soul away, what do you do? You may quickly begin to recite prayers of repentance and ask to be forgiven. Moreover several who disappeared from the shores of the earth never had such opportunity; ere they opened their mouth life like vapour was snatched from them. It then means you never prepared for the saviour. When some of you near aging you begin to prepare for death; while some are engrossed with putting down their will, some are about preparing where to be buried. What manner of a man are you who took time to prepare for an uncertain journey where the end is unknown? You should rather prepare to meet the saviour knowing well that you are dead already and your life hid in Christ Jesus. Nonetheless if you are yet alive to the world, then prepare for death, but why die while time still lingers.

"Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness. Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." 2Pet. 3: 11-13

See the gospels again... Looking for and hasting unto...The matter was urgent to them and they were not only looking for the day but were in haste to come to it. Hallelujah! I am presently overwhelmed and pray God to help me even at this hour as I peruse through his holy words again.

Why the demonstration of hastiness concerning this day? What is special about this day? What were they missing all these years that would be met on this day? What would the Lord do to them on this day? I see these men thinking all night for this day and I see that all their thoughts and imaginations were climaxed with the issues of this day. Little wonder in all their admonitions in scripture, there was actually no page left out in addressing the issues of this day. I see you running around, from church to church and from one convention to another, and I would have paused to ask you, what are you in haste about? Who bewitched you to think that what you are running about for is what God is interested on? I see you run from one deliverance meeting to another, and I am asking if deliverance from sin is not enough, holy believer! If truly you had needed yet another deliverance, probably from poverty, then what happened when you got born again, was any step missed in your eternal deliverance from the bondage of Satan? Then if truly that were your case, then you need the saviour, who will wash away your sins once and for all. See what the concerns of the disciples were; for which they are always in expectation. They were looking for their saviour and were in haste to meet him. It was their sermon, it was their prayer points. The new believers of those days, were always asking: when he is coming? Some of them were even bothered about this; from what direction and where he would appear. So that in trying to douse their curiosity the Lord had often warned them to beware of deceivers who would say, lo here is Christ or lo there. So that their haste and search do not turn to impatience. It was their hymn all day long. However I do not wonder why new believers of our day would ask the contrary; no one, not even the pulpit is expecting the saviour, but nonetheless he shall truly come, probably at your unguarded hour, when you least expected him. Many years gone while in high school, I was privileged to serve as the president of my Christian fellowship. On one occasion, the dawn suddenly became cloudy and dark; movements were even restricted for

visibility. I had managed the trek to school and on approaching other students who had gathered in a classroom began to beckon on me to come hastily, that today is the day they have all waited for. They were expecting the saviour and thought it was that day. Nonetheless there were some predictions to that effect, and everyone was so alarmed. When I came into the hall, it was indeed a sober moment for they were all singing and worshipping. I had sincerely wished that was the day, to see how gloriously the King should be welcome. But I also knew it was not the day, so in reluctance I dismissed the audience. The scriptures have always carefully chosen the right terms as in describing the day: as a thief in the night. Please, ponder on this carefully.

"But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him. And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming." 1 John 2: 27-28

You can come to the same level of confidence when the Lord appears if you do his will and abide in him. The assurance of faith within the heart of Brother John was because he has done his Lord's will. He is sure not to be ashamed when his Lord comes. It was for this singular reason that he could pray saying: come, Lord Jesus. The above scripture shows that when the Lord comes, some brethren would be full of confidence while some would be ashamed. May you not be ashamed, holy beloved! So it is evident that John's prayer was not for boastfulness but a reflection of his readiness. How ready are you believer in Christ? There is something that seems to be on display in our undergraduate days especially during the exam-inations. Some walk into the hall with a certain demeanor of boldness. They just walk in and sit down waiting for the papers. Others may also appear bold but seem to carry a kind of message on their

forehead - I'm ready but would not mind if this exams is postponed. The outcome of the results also clears the air; while some had real boldness, some others had false boldness. What shall your state be on that day? However while yet pondering on this matter please follow me as I quickly look into what happened with the ten virgins:

The Ten Virgins-what happened?

"Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out." Matt.25: 1-8

I shall in a moment bring to light seven things issuing from the above scripture which we shall be pondering on together. Meanwhile let us try to enumerate them;

1. They had one mission.
2. They were united in fellowship.
3. They were confident about the task.
4. They knew the relevance in the lamps and the oil.
5. They all slumbered and slept.
6. They all arose in response to the cry.
7. They all trimmed their lamps.

The mission of the ten virgins was one-to meet the bridegroom. The entire preparation in their years of virginity was to meet the saviour. For this aim these have kept themselves from the pollutions of the world and had followed strictly all level of religious sanctity. The life they had lived before men qualified them to be called virgins. My worry is shall all these be a waste at the coming of my saviour? Again these virgins were united in one fellowship. They went in and out together encouraging themselves, singing hymns and dividing the scriptures all in expectation of their

saviour. They all were confident of meeting the Lord and greeting him at his return. If you ever attended funerals, you would be compelled to believing that they have all gone to meet the saviour whose funerals you attended. The encomiums poured on the dead and the discussion of how much he loved the Lord are themselves convincing, but I ask, is it so? The first appearance of these virgins would convince you of their success. They looked alike, spoke alike and all preached same message. They went forth according to scriptures for nothing less but to meet their saviour. When you come into a garden you would confuse the grass and flower for they both look so much alike, and if you attempt to uproot the grass, you may remove the flower also except by a very careful and attentive search. In the same vein these virgins look same except for one. These went not without taking their lamps and the oil. They knew that was an indispensable material needed to greet the saviour. You cannot appear in a wedding night without your lamps on. You may stumble and get your garments stained before you reach the occasion. Then they all slumbered and slept. You cannot sleep when your house is on fire. So they all slept because they knew nothing else was at stake. They slept in full assurance that their work is done, and that the bridegroom shall receive their labours. If you had met such brethren sleep you would not help but join to sleep, not minding that something is missing. So it is with some congregations, when you come into their gathering, you would think you are now at the right place, not knowing that their house is the way to hell and their end destruction, for you would sleep on with them but the sleep of death. At the night cry, they all arose. See how sensitive they were to the night cry. It goes to confirm their confidence. How I pray that you shall be confident and not be ashamed at the Lord's coming, amen. It is like the 'waiting dead', these are all waiting, some had waited for many thousand years, humh, yet some shall be ashamed. May God help the reader and the writer, and all we who are yet alive, that we shall know no shame, amen. Then they all trimmed their lamps. These lamps had burn all night. They were in burning all through the waiting hours and through that night. They only needed to be trimmed. The first groups of five had trimmed and were not in any form of anxiety. Their

confidence was not disappointed. They had prepared for the long night. They knew the long night was coming and so they prepared for it. They had kept savings for the rainy days. They were the virgins who prepared for the night. Some thousands have already gone into that long night without good preparation, what shall their lot be? You too who read these may someday enter into your long rest, what preparations have you done? The other groups of five trimmed their lamps, but these were out. They could not last the night and there was great anxiety. The earlier confidence had vanished within a twinkle of an eye. They had slept without a preparation. How would you go on such a long night without oil savings? They had burnt off their little oil in attending to the pleasures of this world, and saved none to greet their saviour. Alas I hear the sinners voice, oh no, I had known...but alas it was late. I then knew that they had all slept for different reasons: while one slept for the weariness and physical exhaustion of the body, the others slept a spiritual sleep. Their confidence was a show of emptiness. These were they that would say according to the Pilgrims Progress of John Bunyan: we are all going to Zion city and we are sure of receiving the King's honour. So is your claim yet there is nothing in you that represents the King and his Lord 'Christ'. Several of such believers are already laying claim to Zion city but their confidence shall fail because their lives contradicts the life of the Lord of Zion city. Check beloved your life through and through whether you are of Zion city. Check your heart whether its issues are those of semblance to the heart of those inclined to Zion city, or a heart already encumbered with much mundane.

"And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence..."

It was for this confidence that made our brother John pray in such a manner. You can have confidence at his coming when you abide in him completely. You can like Brother John pray in full assurance of faith saying: come, Lord Jesus, when you have cast behind you the world and all that is in it and your gaze on Jesus only. If your heart would cry in such a manner before you descend into that long awaited night, then your confidence shall rejoice at the appearance of our Lord. Let us pray! ■



THE PERILOUS TIMES

By Bro Ajibola Ayotunde

TEXT: 2Tim 3:1-9

INTRODUCTION

As we eagerly await the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, it is expedient for us to know also that in the last days, perilous times shall come (2Tim 3:1). The tone of this verse is that of certainty. It is not a guess or a probability, it shall definitely come; in fact, it is here already. This is the reason why every believer must brace up to face it. When a man becomes aware of a plan to burgle his house, he remains awake and alert, probably informs the security agencies and does all within his power to thwart the plans of the robbers, not allowing his house to be broken into (Matt 24:43-44). Likewise, our disposition to the perilous times should be that of preparedness; a conscious pre-paration for these difficult times in order not to be lost in it.

We shall consider, in this study,

- The meaning of Perilous Times.
- The nature or characteristics of these times.
- What our response should be to it.

WHAT DOES THE PHRASE 'PERILOUS TIMES' REFER TO?

The word, Perilous, is taken from the Greek word *chalepos* which means dangerous, hazardous, full of risk(s),

troubling, as in a perilous situation. It is synonymous with being unsafe, precarious, parlous, and fraught with danger, fierce, difficult and hard to bear.

Let no man deceive you that perilous times are far away. These are the times we actually are in. It has been the experience of Christians since the time of the Apostles. And I want you to understand that the gospel has always excelled in such times. Remember it was during such difficult times in Ephesus that the Word of God grew mightily and prevailed (Acts 19:20). Actually the persecution that attended such times served to propagate the gospel like never before. Our generation is no exemption; in many regions of the world today declaring your stand for Christ will actually put your life in peril. Many today are being killed and imprisoned because they have decided not to compromise their stand in the face of oppositions. Do not be discouraged. All these only signal the nearness of the coming of our dear Saviour. For we must through much tribulations enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22).

So, we are in the last days and the perilous times are upon us. Therefore every believer must be well armed for these times.

NATURE/CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PERILOUS TIMES

For people will be lovers of self and

(utterly) self-centered, lovers of money and aroused by an inordinate (greedy) desire for wealth, proud and arrogant and contemptuous boasters. They will be abusive (blasphemous, scoffing), disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy and profane. (They will be) without natural (human) affection (callous and inhuman), relentless (admitting of no truce or appeasement); (they will be) slanderers (false accusers, trouble-makers), intemperate and loose in morals and conduct, uncontrolled and fierce, haters of good (They will be) treacherous (betrayers), rash, (and) inflated with self-conceit. (They will be) lovers of sensual pleasures and vain amusements more than and rather than lovers of God. For (although) they hold a form of piety (true religion), they deny and reject and are strangers to the power of it (their conduct belies the genuineness of their profession). Avoid (all) such people (turn away from them). 2Tim 3:2-5

1. We shall consider, in no particular order, some of the issues highlighted in the verses of scripture above.

In these perilous times men will be lovers of sensual pleasures and vain amusements more than and rather than lovers of God. This point can easily be observed by any watchful believer in our generation.

Is it not obvious that in our various churches we have become pleasure-seekers rather than God-seekers? Even worldly amusements like comedies/jesting have crept

into various congregations. We have made the molten calf of entertainment/pleasure for our congregation in the absence of God's visitation (Exodus 32:8). We have become entertainers like Samson in the Philistine prison having lost the seven locks of our anointing (Judges 16:20-25). This we do in order to keep the crowd. Rather than seek God - a rewarding venture, we now gratify our flesh's demand for sensual pleasure. Beloved, return quickly from this downward trend if you must be victorious during these perilous times!

Is it the time wasted on social media even inside the church, rather than listening to the edifying word of God? Be careful beloved because that which you have set thy heart upon to pursue is targeted towards destroying your soul. The 'Aarons' which are leading the children of God astray will definitely not be spared of the coming judgment. They are such men that take advantage of the ignorance of their flock in order to plunder them. They presently withstand the truth of God's word like Jannes and Jambres did to Moses. From such, beloved, turn away!

2. During this perilous times men will hold a form of piety (true religion, godliness) and deny and reject and are strangers to the power of it (their conduct belies the genuineness of their profession). The Bible says about our Lord Jesus in Acts 1:14 "The former treatise have I made of Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach". Now before our Lord Jesus took it upon himself to start teaching the word, He had been practicing/ doing what he was going to teach men. So, his lifestyle corroborated what he was saying. But in these perilous times, men's voices speak louder than their lives. Their life by their conduct belies the genuineness of their profession. They are strangers to the comprehensive equipment of the word of God that changes the lives of men, because their own lives have not been affected by the word of God they preach.

Is that not your own story dearly

beloved? There is no portion of the scripture you cannot expound but yet this same scripture that is changing the lives of many the world over has no lasting impact on your life. If I were you, I will go to God in prayer now for him to change my situation. Stop preaching for now, rather sit down and submit your life to the transforming effect of God's word.

3. Also, people will be lovers of self and (utterly) self-centered, lovers of money and aroused by an inordinate (greedy) desire for wealth.

By nature, every man is self-centered. That is the character inherited from Adam by every man; that primitive instinct to gather for self. Every natural man considers himself before others. This is contrary to the injunction given in the scripture in Phil 2:3 that "in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves". But many believers live contrary to this due to the demands of their yet-to-be-terminated self-life. Know ye not that you have been crucified with Christ, nevertheless you live; yet not you, but Christ lives in you? And they that are Christ have crucified the flesh and the lusts thereof (Gal 2:20; 5:24).

Now because of the love for self, a man, being self-centered is driven by an inordinate desire for wealth which can never satisfy him. He does not know the place of the virtue of godliness with contentment being a great gain (1Tim6:6). Such people are like the rich fool (Luke 12:21) who kept amassing wealth on earth but was never rich towards God. He had no treasure in heaven. Do you not know, that where your treasure is, there will your heart be also? (Matt6:21). Or that the wealth which you possess is only meant for the advancement of the Kingdom of God on earth? Go, therefore, sell all thou have and give to the poor and thou shall have treasure in heaven, then come and follow Christ all the way (Matt19:21).

4. Men will be proud, arrogant and contemptuous boasters. Pride of life will be the order of the day. Men will even seek the anointing of the Holy

Spirit just to boast in it. They will go to any extent in order to service their ego. Forget not, brethren, that it was pride in the devil's heart- though not yet acted out- that ousted him from heaven among the holy angels of God (Isa 14:12-13). He who once was the 'son of the morning' became the 'fallen from heaven', because of his pomp. So if you are proud, you have the devil as your father. The Bible says God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble (Jam 4:6). If you're a proud/arrogant man then you are standing in opposition to God. In fact the Lord is resisting everything about you presently. Is it not the pride in your heart that is making it difficult for you to apologize to your wife/church member over what you did wrong? I beseech you to let go of your pride and humble yourself before the Lord that He may exalt you in due time. Many homes are in shambles today because of pride. May God deliver us from this 'plague'. Why not embrace the way of Christ who took upon himself the form of a servant (John13:5) in washing the feet of His disciples?

5. Men will be intemperate and incontinent, loose in morals and conduct and disobedient to parents. This is glaring in our society today, even in our Churches. The lack of discipline/temperance in many homes has led to churning out of wayward children into the society. People are loose in morals and conducts nowadays. Things abominable are now boldly displayed on the streets of our nation. Just recently, same-sex marriage was legalized in the United States. In fact, there are cities referred to as Sin Cities in many countries, where like Sodom and Gomorrah, all kinds of evil you can think of occur. Many are given to pornography, fornication, indecent dressing and the likes even in our churches that ought to be pillar and ground of the truth. Secularism and humanism has crept into our churches. In fact we no longer rebuke people, we rather tell them what their itchy ears want to hear (2Tim4:3). Parents no longer have control over what their wards watch as movies or wear as clothes. They are being regarded as old school

when they correct their children. This evil must stop amongst us. We must go back to Christ, to the ancient path, (Jer6:16) if this generation will not be lost in this perilous times. Remember, the onus is on you parents to train up a child in the way he should go so that when he is old he will not depart from it (Pro22:6). And the child is to remember his creator in the days of his youth (Ecc12:1) and to obey and honour his parents in the Lord (Eph6:1-2).

6. Men will be uncontrolled and fierce, haters of good and treacherous (betrayers). They will be without natural (human) affection (callous and inhuman) and slanderous (false abusers, trouble makers).

One doesn't have to look too far to notice all these attitudes in today's society. And I pray that we would not be caught up in them. Men are uncontrolled and fierce and hate anything good. They vehemently oppose anything good because the nature inside them does not agree with it. Even some so called Pastors nowadays stand in outright opposition to what some genuine men of God are preaching. And if I may ask, is your life not evidently showing that you are a hater of good? Does a careful observation of your life not reveal that you are living an untamed life? That your life is a denial of your profession? Why not cry to God now for the necessary encounter that will change your life? People accuse one another falsely in order to take advantage of them. They lack human affection. They can be callous to one another without apology or remorse. From such people desist.

DO NOT BE DECEIVED

Deception is a very crucial thing a believer must guard against in these perilous times. It is the number one enemy of; nay, the opposite of the truth. It is championed by Satan, the father of lies. There has never been so great an attack against the truth as we are experiencing now. Even amongst believers we have men who believe the part of the truth that soothes their several indulgences. If

we must be overcomers in these times, we must violently resist every form of deception that is being peddled around us. Hear the words of Christ in Matt 24:4-5, "Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many". Take note that Christ says many shall be deceived by these false Christs and false prophets. Therefore you must be extra careful not to be a victim of such deception. Take heed O ye Saint of God that no man deceive thee from this path that leads to life. This is how you will be kept from falling during this perilous times.

You may ask, 'how then can one be kept from falling into deception?' Or, 'how can I guard against deception?' First, it is by taking heed to the word of God. The Scriptures say "thy word have I hid in my heart that I may not sin against thee." (Psa 119:11) The potent tool against deception is the understanding of the Word of God. It insulates you from every lie the devil is peddling. Let the word of God dwell in you richly beloved (Col 3:16). Many people are being taught the traditions of men today and they are falling for it due to their ignorance of what the Scriptures say about the issues they are faced with. Remember that our Lord Jesus Christ always resisted the devil and his agents by what is written in the Scriptures and man cannot live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God (Matt4:4). The Word of God which is Christ himself will protect you from all sorts of deceit in these perilous times. Be like the Berean Christians who received the word with readiness of mind and searched the scriptures daily, if those things were so. (Acts17:11).

The other way to guard against deception is watchfulness and prayerfulness. Anyone who refuses to pray has agreed to be a prey to the devil. Jesus was greatly involved in this spiritual exercise. He lived a life of prayer throughout his ministry. No wonder he came out victorious. Pray without ceasing, (1Thess5:17) if you will be victorious in these times. Then, be very watchful through the

Word of God. Watch and pray that ye enter not into the pit of temptation the enemy has dug for every careless soldier of Christ.

ARMING YOURSELF FOR THE PERILOUS TIMES

In view of the challenges of these times, we shall consider how and with what a believer must equip himself during this difficult times. We must note that any Christian who is not prepared for these times will become history while he is yet alive.

We shall glean from the book of Eph 6:10-18. May the Lord grant us understanding in Jesus' name.

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching there unto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;

Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Eph 6:10.

This is the first admonition. We believers, in these perilous times, are to be strong in the Lord of hosts and Captain of our salvation. This actually presupposes that the believer has an unbroken relationship with the Lord. You cannot be strong in a man that you

are ignorant of. Being strong in the Lord means that a believer must know the God in whom he is to be strong. It is those that know their God that shall be strong and do exploits (Dan11:32b). Now the word 'strong' is from the Greek word *endunamoo*, which is also used in 2 Tim 4:17; Phil 4:13; Acts 9:22; 1 Tim 1:2; It means to acquire strength, to strengthen, to enable and to increase in strength. Therefore the onus is on the believer to acquire this strength from the Lord. You are expected to get, gain, obtain, procure and secure this strength from Christ Jesus. If the responsibility were to be on the Lord alone, then every apostate and weak believer would have blamed the Lord for their predicament. But it is not so. Power and Strength are available in Christ Jesus. So whatever becomes of you in these times is your responsibility. Therefore, I urge you to be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power.

This admonition reminds me of Joshua who was being encouraged in like manner to be strong and very courageous so that he may be able to do according to all that the Law commanded (Josh1:7). God knew that the strength to conquer the nations will only come from being strong in the Word of the Lord which is Christ himself. David's victory over Goliath was not due to his strength, in fact, he was just a 17 years old lad when he confronted and conquered the mighty Goliath - a mighty Philistine warrior. If he was not strong in the Lord and in His mighty power, his life would have been wasted in battle.

O soldier of the Lord! Don't cower at the enormity of the battle before you. Don't lose courage to continue in this race. Let not your heart be discouraged nor troubled. I admonish you to be strong in the Lord who is the Captain of your Salvation. He is our General who has fought the battle and won and is sitting at the right hand of power, of the throne of God. He is the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. The success of this battle rests on the shoulder of our commanding officer. Let us obey his instructions and we will be victorious.

Put on the whole armour of God. Eph

6:11, 13

Before we consider the components of the whole armour of God, we should note that any believer who will put on the whole armour of God must have a stand with God.

In Eph 5: 14, he says stand therefore; it is impossible for one to put on the whole armour of God in a fallen state: when you are wallowing in sin and compromise. The whole armour of God is not for sinners, it is for men who are standing on their feet and are battle-ready. Woe to that soldier who is lying down, relaxed and indulging in civilian affairs when the enemy comes upon him! He shall have himself to blame. No man that wars entangles himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier (2Tim 2:3-4). Be on your guard, endure hardness and discipline as a good soldier of Christ.

The position of standing also connotes readiness for battle. Beloved how battle-ready are you? How is your stand with God? How is your inner man? Your outward appearance may deceive mortal men but not God; deep within you are already having a romance with sin. You cannot be equipped with the whole armour of God in such a state. Here are a few examples to learn from. Samson was asleep and Delilah cut his locks of anointing. King Saul was asleep and his spear was taken away from his very side. Noah was asleep and his graceless son discovered his father's nakedness. Eutychus fell asleep, nods and falls from the third loft, and was taken up for dead. No temptation is too weak, but is strong enough to foil a Christian that is napping in security. Thus the Christian asleep in security may soon be surprised as to lose much of his spiritual strength.

Stand dearly beloved. Compromise though little is not negotiable. A soldier who is reclining when his captain bids him stand is liable of being court-marshalled. In fact, if he is a sentinel, he is worthy of death because his sleep can cost the whole army their lives if the enemy took advantage of it to gain access to their territory. You cannot enlist in

the Lord's army if you are not ready to obey this order from him. Do not break the ranks dear soldier of Christ. Remember you need to stand strong in the Lord. He has no need for weaklings at the battle front lest the casualty be increased. Strengthen thy feeble knees and lift up the hands which hang down (Heb12:12).

Note that as regards the whole armour of God, there is need for every saint to put it on. Nobody is born with it. Even the strongest/noblest of saints was not born with it. It must be consciously put on. Therefore the onus is on every believer to put on the whole armour of God in these perilous times. The other thing which is worthy of note is the nature of the armour. It is regarded as the armour of God, meaning that it is provided by the Lord for any saint who is in need of it. No wonder it has the potency against the wiles of the enemy. So, dear saint put it on in its entirety. When you arm yourself partially, it is only to your detriment. Put on the whole armour of God in order to wade through this perilous time.

Why should I put on the whole armour of God? Eph 6: 11-13

The first reason why we must be armed with the whole armour of God is because we are in the perilous times; we are in the evil day when iniquity has become the order of the day and the love of many believers waxing cold. As a matter of fact, many believers are being deceived and are going apostate. If we as servants who are waiting for their Lord must stand and be victorious then we must put on the whole armour of God.

Secondly, we must put on the whole armour of God in order to be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. The Greek word for wiles signifies the art and order one observes in handling a point; we may say such a one is methodical. So the wiles of the devil refer to the subtlety with which he deceives a believer /his prey. He presents his point even with scriptural support. No wonder many believers fall for it the way Eve fell in Eden. So if we must stand against the wiles of that old serpent, we must be

armed with the whole armour of God.

The third reason why we must put on the whole armour of God is because we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. That your friend/neighbour that looks like the enigma to your spiritual progress is only being manipulated by the spiritual wickedness and powers in the high places. Therefore arm thyself with the whole armour of God in order to be victorious.

Now let us consider the components of the armour which we must put on.

1. Girded with the Belt of Truth - Eph 6:14

This is a very essential portion of the armour of God which a believer must be girded with in these perilous times. This 'truth' is the Word of God in one sense and sincerity of heart in another. Note that both have a common source and the latter is a product of the former. Jesus, speaking in John 17: 17, said, 'Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth'. The Word of God is not only true, it is truth. It is reality. A believer must be grounded in it through and through and also have his loins girded with it in these perilous times. He must study to show himself approved unto God, a workman that needed not to be ashamed rightly dividing the Word of truth (2Tim 2:15).

Now from 1Pet1:13, we will discover that it says, 'Gird up the loins of your minds'. So, your loins actually refer to your mind which must always be renewed by the truth of God's Word (Rom 12: 2).

To help us understand more about the Belt of Truth, let go down history lane to consider the importance of the belt as a piece of the armoury of a Roman soldier. The belt, known

as cingulum or balteus, was used to hold the scabbard, without which there would be no place to put the sword. Imagine a soldier charging out into battle without this belt and consequently without a sword, he will end up being a victim. In addition, Nelson Study Bible says from the belt hung strips of leather to protect the lower body. So the belt secures in place all the other components of the armour. In fact it holds the only offensive weapon in our armoury. Therefore during this hour when many are deviating from the truth, and turning aside to myths, the belt of truth must cleave to a believer like the belt to the body. He must gird the loins of his mind with the word of God.

2. Putting on the Breastplate of Righteousness - Eph 6:14

The breastplate (habergeon, cuirass or coat of mail) was a central part of the Roman soldier's armour- he wore it to protect the chest/torso which contains some vital organs like heart and lungs. Without a breastplate, a soldier will be asking for instant death as each attack from the enemy could be fatal. Fellow pilgrim, in this perilous times, you would be taking a great risk if you are devoid of this essential component of your armour which is meant to guard your heart against the assault of the enemy. Remember Ahab in 1Kings 22, it was a defect in his breastplate that led to his death after he was shot at by the arrows of the enemy. Do not take thy breastplate for granted. Always put it on, for your own good.

Now the Righteousness referred to here is not self-righteousness. The best of our righteousness acts are as filthy rags before God (Isa64:6). But thanks be to God who has made provision for us in Christ Jesus. In that He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2Cor 5: 21). So, the righteousness which we must have as our breastplate is the one

imparted upon us by God through Christ Jesus. Now righteousness connotes our right standing with God which is very important in these perilous times. In fact, a man cannot stand before God neither can he stand in battle if he is devoid of it. This was the issue when Joshua the high priest was being opposed by Satan in Zech 3-his garment was filthy. Also, in the parable of the wedding feast in Matt 22, that guest was thrown out because he was not properly attired with the wedding garment. Now having had this righteousness imparted unto us, we ought to live right (1John3:7). A tree is known by its fruits (Luke6:44). You cannot of an apple tree reap mango fruit. So the product of Christ being your righteousness in this perilous time is your righteous living.

3. Feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace - Eph 6:15

Shoes or greaves of brass were part of the military armour (1Sam 17: 6). They were worn to protect the feet against traps and sharp sticks placed on the way by the enemy to hurt the feet of the soldier. Those whose feet were injured were unfit to march. Imagine that someone's foot has been amputated. He cannot have access to the shoes and cannot go to the battle field. The battle field is not for handicapped men. Such are unfit for the battle. Can a man without feet stand in battle? Sadly, no. Beloved, do you have a stand with God? Are you on your feet? Or, have your feet been amputated by sin, so that you can no longer walk with God again? Many Christian's feet have been caught by the traps of the enemy because their feet are not shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Instead of declaring their stand wherever they go, they keep mute. Due to their unpreparedness, their feet are injured by compromise because they are walking barefooted. When you refuse to take a stand then you are ready to fall for anything.

Secondly, the feet are for ambulation, to carry the body wherever it is meant to go. A man without feet is stationary. Such a person is no threat to the enemy. He will only end up becoming spoils of war if he attempts going for battle.

Now the implication of our feet being shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace is that every believer's aim wherever he goes must be to propagate the gospel of peace/ Christ/salvation. Every relationship initiated by any believer must be for the advancement of the kingdom. Any work taken up by a believer must be for the furtherance of the gospel. So many believers have lost sight of this important principle that guided the Apostles of old. They are involved only in whatever will advance their course but not that of the kingdom. Their feet only take them to where they gain maximum benefit, sometimes at the detriment of the kingdom of God.

The scriptures say in Rom 10:15, "... *How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things*". Also in Luke 2: 14 when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the angels met the shepherds with the good news saying "glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men." Now the gospel of peace is that Christ came to the earth that man might be reconciled with God. As a matter of fact, that man might find peace with his creator. This is the gospel of peace that Christ Jesus came to mediate. And every believer must be armed with it wherever they go. Every believer's feet must be shod with it. We must carry it to the nations. This was the attitude of the saints of old and this must also be our attitude. Christ said in Matt 28: 19, 20, 'Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world'. This is the great commission which must be carried out by every believer wherever he/she goes.

4. Take the shield of Faith - Eph 6:16

"Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherein ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." Eph 6:16;

The passage above shows the importance of faith above all the other components of the armour of God. It also shows the nature of our avowed enemy, here described as the wicked. The shield of faith is the chief of all the components of the armour of God. In fact it is described as a shield here because it serves as an overall protection for other components against the fiery darts of the enemy. Therefore, above all, take the shield of faith; it is an indispensable defensive weapon.

Now when we consider the nature of the weaponry of our adversary, we will better appreciate the need for the shield of faith. A fiery dart is an arrow that is laced with fire. When it is shot, it sets its target on fire. In the same way, the devil targets believers with fiery darts of temptations that can only be quenched by the shield of faith. The Bible says in 1John5:5, "*For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith*". Alleluia! We have victory over the fiery darts of our enemy by our faith. It is very reassuring to know this! Beloved, if your shield of faith is in place then be assured that you have victory over the devil; his fiery darts cannot get to you as long as you hold up your shield of faith.

Now, how does one get this shield of faith? In Rom 10:17, "*So, then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*". It is by hearing the word of God that your faith can be built up. Some have their faith built on the perishing things of this world; others on their achievements. No wonder they are easily stricken by the fiery darts of the devil. Beloved, where does your faith lie? I admonish you to build your most holy faith up by the Word of God and by praying in the Holy Ghost. (Rom 10:17; Jude1:20) Such faith can never be shipwrecked! For, by such faith the saints of old obtained a good report!

(Heb11:2)

Take a look at Heb11:33-40, 'who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, and they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect'.

See what great exploits a faith that is working can achieve! These cloud of witnesses now surround us, awaiting our victory through faith. Beloved, have the faith of God and position your shield for the battle before thee. Thy victory is assured!

5. The Helmet of Salvation - Eph6:17

The helmet is an important component of the armour meant for the protection of our head. It is described here as the helmet of salvation. The head region of our body ought to be well protected because it is crucial to our functionality. That is where majority of our senses are situated. That is where our thoughts, emotions, intellect, and will emanate from. In the head is the brain, from where other parts of the body receive instructions/are controlled. Therefore, it requires adequate protection.

Once a man is saved (has received salvation), it simply means that his head is under cover/protection. Everything about his personality

changes: his thoughts, his vision, his conversation etc. That in itself is a weapon! It is our salvation that secures the communion between our Head (Christ) and the body (we-the church).

Have you been delivered from the shackles of sin? Are you truly saved? Is your helmet of salvation still intact/secure? What is your relationship with Christ -your head? Seeing the importance of this helmet of salvation, Apostle Paul, through the Holy Spirit wrote that we should work out our salvation with fear and trembling. Phil 2: 12. Don't joke with your salvation; it is a crucial component of your armour. Salvation cannot be earned; it is by grace through faith. It is the free gift of God to mankind. Eph2: 8, 9. God wants all men saved. In fact He has long suffered towards us, not wanting that any should perish but that all should come to repentance and secure their helmet of salvation. 2Pet 3: 9. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. John 3: 16. If you must not perish in this battle and become the spoils of war, you must ensure that your helmet of salvation is intact by working out your salvation with fear and trembling.

6. The Sword of the Spirit - Eph 6: 17

This serves as both an offensive and a defensive weapon. In fact, it is the only offensive weapon available to the soldier of Christ. Men of old who wielded it were victorious in the battle all the way. And the more a soldier wields it, the more experienced he becomes in the use of it. Heb 5: 13.

The sword of the Spirit referred to here is the word of God. Now, in Heb 4: 12, the word of God is even described as being sharper than any two edged sword. This is the nature of the sword of the Spirit that is at our disposal. How

victorious then should a believer be who is skilled in wielding it? But alas, many a believer are babes who are not skilful in wielding the sword of the Spirit. They still have to be fed with milk like babes. Heb 5: 12-14.

It is pertinent to note here that the life of the person wielding the sword is as important as the sword he is wielding. The sword of the Spirit has become useless in the hands of many believers like the rod of Elisha in the hands of Gehazi being unable to restore life back to the dead son of the Shunamite woman. The sword is always as effective as the life of the bearer. It is as important as your life. Devoid of it, the soldier is as good as dead. Imagine Christ not being armed with the word of God, He would have fallen headlong into the Devil's temptation. But thanks to God, He who is the Word incarnate was actually armed with the potent word of God. The devil is conquered and overcome by the words of our testimony (the word of God).

How then can you be armed with the word of God as the sword of the Spirit in these perilous times?

- By studying the word of God 2Tim 2: 15
- By meditating on it day and night Josh 1: 8; Ps 1: 2, 3; 119: 11
- By preaching and teaching it. 2Tim 4: 1, 2; 3: 16, 17
- By waging war with it in prayer. Luke 4: 1-13; Heb 4: 12

7. Watch and Pray Always - Eph 6: 18

Dearly beloved, if we must be victorious over our avowed enemy with this panoply at our disposal, then we must give heed to this final exhortation: watch and pray always. This is one singular act the Apostles gave themselves continually to in Acts 6: 4. And we cannot do less if we must

record/witness tremendous victory over the wicked one. Hear what Jesus told the disciples in Luke 21: 36, "Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man." At another place He said "Pray that ye enter not into temptation" Luke 22: 40

Even Christ Jesus our Lord had to pray earnestly until his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. Luke 22: 44. And He was heard in that he feared (Heb 5: 7). If Christ had to agonise in prayer until victory was won, then we should do no less. Take advantage of the sweet hour of prayer. Watch and pray if thou must shout victory at last at the end of this battle. Put on the whole armour of God prayerfully.

CONCLUSION

The devil, like an uncircumcised Philistine (our avowed enemy) has decided to defy the army of the living God during these perilous times. He is roaming about like a roaring lion seeking whom to devour. In fact many Christians who have lost their identities /stand have become a prey in the hand of the wicked one during these perilous times.

How are the mighty fallen and the weapons of war perished! The shields of our mighty men have been vilely cast away at the battlefield as though they were not anointed with oil. Weep O ye saints, as many as love the Lord, that the Lord will preserve His own even during these perilous times.

This is a clarion call to all Christians to take their stand as they put on the whole armour of God and praying with all kinds of prayer and not to retreat but to take the battle to the gates of the enemy. Remember there is no provision for armour for your back. Turning back is not an option! Let us pray. ■



THE GREAT NEGLECT

By Sis Iberedem David

Every soldier knows what it means to receive a command, especially the last command from the highest ranking commander before departure for a battle. At that point in time nothing else matters as this is considered most important. There is silence everywhere as the soldier take in every word, every command, and every strategy into his heart because he knows it's very important for the battle ahead. He listens keenly and is prepared to carry out everything he is asked to do, even to his death for he knows that there lies his honour. This was the state of the believers as Christ gave them the great commission even as he prepared to leave them. This indeed was the last command before his exit as they prepared to go to the battle ground- A Great Commission it was!

A mandate given to us by God, a command he gave to us followers that the purpose for which he came may be fulfilled amongst men of various tribes and tongues for generations unending. For a commission so great, one would expect thorough obedience, total yielded-ness and commitment in carrying it out but it would seem that for today's believer the reverse is the case. The soldiers have entangled themselves with civilian affairs and have neglected the commission - A Great Neglect! The words of our Lord were simple, the instructions loud and clear, yet it would seem vague and veiled to today's believer. What has

changed? Why the change? One may ask. The answer lies in the heart of every man as he will have to answer for himself. Let us look at this commission, that we may know why it is indeed a great neglect. Our Lord Jesus told us in Matt 28:19-20;

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

These are the words that rang in the ears of the disciples at all times, such that after they received the baptism of the Holy Spirit they set to carry out this great task.

Just as Jesus said in John 4:34,

"My meat is to do the will of him that sent me and to finish his work".

So set out the disciples to do the Savior's will. They did set out and began to preach, teach and baptize men. This they did with all their might. In persecution they stood firm, through trials, temptations, oppositions they wavered not. They cared not for what men would do but were determined to carry out the Saviour's command. For many, it cost their lives or that of a loved one, Stephen being the first of the many martyrs, but rather than

being discouraged they strove harder and faster. In the words of Apostle Paul in II Corinthians 4:8.

"We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed, we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down but not destroyed".

Paul would stop at nothing to reach the Gentiles, he took the commission serious and indeed very personal - as it should be! His was indeed to go into all the nations. There however seem to be a change with today's believer. There is a great deviation from that which is to be our life, there is a great neglect of that which our Lord Jesus considered very important and left us with. Let us now look carefully into this great neglect that we may mend our unrighteous and rebellious ways.

GO YETHEREFORE

This can be paraphrased to mean, you therefore go. The command is thus individualized; you, me. It is spoken to every believer on a personal note. It was never meant for a select few, those "called" to be missionaries or evangelist, as many have relegated this task to them and have sat back to cross their legs. It is for everyone but we have neglected this and gone about our own businesses. Jesus says, go ye therefore, the question you should ask is, go to where? Yes, you may not be called to go to a foreign land but haven't

you been called to go to your neighborhood, your estate, your workplace, your community, your school or have you forgotten what Jesus said in Acts 1:8b?

"Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem (where they dwelt presently) and in all Judea and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

Have you been a witness for Jesus where you find yourself presently or are you guilty of this great neglect? To go is an act of deliberateness, it requires your purposefully setting out. It requires your prayers, preparation, sensitivity and obedience to the Holy Spirit as he leads you to persons and places. Some

Christians tell themselves that their lives are living epistles and that as men watch them they will get converted. The bible tells us in Romans 10:14-17;

"How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esias saith, Lord, who shall believe our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God".

Have we not been sent? Your life will speak to their hearts and point them to Christ, that is true but they need to know the good news, it's not enough to just be. Our Lord Jesus who lived righteously and blamelessly before God deliberately preached to men, he didn't just live the life, he began to do and to teach. Beloved, it is in word and in deed. The Apostle Paul whose statement we quoted above was himself a missionary who preached of God's love. Will

you not therefore go?

TEACH ALL NATIONS

That all nations be taught is what our Master wants. Every tribe and tongue may come to know him as Lord of all is his will. Oh! How we have neglected this also. Some of us don't want to hear of taking this gospel to other lands where men and women perish daily in their ignorance and go to hell fire. The gospel is for all people. What part are you playing to see that this good news is heard in all the lands or have you too joined in this great neglect? Have you gone, prayed, or given for the furtherance of God's work in these hinterlands? Don't you know it is part of our command to obey? What sacrifice have you paid for this? You may say I cannot go to a foreign land as I have not been called, then ask God to open your eyes to what you can do. A soldier who obeys a command half way through is likened to one who didn't obey at all.

We have stopped teaching the nations, we would rather feed itching ears with what they desire to hear. We were told what to teach. We are to teach all nations to observe ALL things whatsoever he has commanded us. This, beloved is quite weighty. Considering the times we live in, many believers are guilty of a neglect of this part. Some of us have gone out, taught, and have baptized men in his name but what have we taught. We may be guilty of teaching SOME things, others NOTHING of which the Lord commanded. We have rather feed God's own flock with chaff and this has profited them nothing but to cause leanness. The bible says in II Timothy 3:16-17;

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works"

This same scripture that was good enough for the patriarchs before us seem not to be good enough for us. We want to add other things to the scriptures to make it attractive to men and in doing so strip it of its potency. That which God gave us in his word that men may observe to do, is that what we are teaching men? Have we labeled some parts of the bible as no go areas for the 21st century believers because they require being dead to self and only taught men the wonderful promises in the bible to pamper their flesh? We may as well be as the scribes and Pharisees who would compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, we make him twofold more of the child of hell than ourselves.

We shut up the kingdom of heaven against men with our teachings. We would rather teach them how to live in this world, obtaining perishing things of clay than how to live with eternity in view. This is a neglect of God's commission and we are guilty of it.

God's word tells us in Hebrews 2:1-3;

"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him".

That command which was given to you by our Lord has been long neglected. God's word coming to us today is that we may repent, arise from our fallen state and like laborers, enter the harvest field to reap for him, like soldiers of the cross, conquer the nations for Christ. A second chance we have received, the clock again has begun ticking, neglect not again the great commission, arise and obey the Master's command. ■

One thing that characterised the journey of Christhood is the sufferings of Christ, of which the first Christians were no strangers. And even in this present time, the first requirement needed to be fulfilled to follow Jesus is to look for your cross and take it. To follow without carrying your cross on your shoulders is to be a breach breaker.



“And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me”. Matt: 10v38

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